

of the National Honor Society, Honor Roll, French Club and has earned awards and accolades as a scholar and an athlete.

Outside the classroom, Michael has distinguished himself as an excellent student-athlete. On the fields of competition, Michael has earned letters in Varsity Hockey and Tennis. He was named Captain of the Varsity Hockey team and served as President of the French Club. Michael's dedication and service to the community and his peers has proven his ability to excel among the leaders at the United States Air Force Academy. I have no doubt that Michael will take the lessons of his student leadership with him to the United States Air Force Academy.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Michael H. Persiani on his appointment to the United States Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs. Our service academies offer the finest military training and education available anywhere in the world. I am sure that Michael will do very well during his career at the United States Air Force Academy. I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing him well as he begins his service to the Nation.

INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION TO EXTEND ELIGIBILITY FOR DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PENSION BENEFITS

HON. NICK J. RAHALL, II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 11, 2005

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing two bills that pay tribute to those service personnel who have nobly served our Nation in times of conflict. In both cases, the legislation extends pension benefits to those veterans who served in harm's way, though not in a time of declared war.

Under current law, you may only draw a full pension if you served in combat during a declared period of war. This distinction served its purpose well during many of America's 20th Century engagements, as our involvement in those wars was clearly defined. World Wars I and II and the Vietnam War are prime examples.

However, American service personnel have served—and faced heavy fighting—in conflicts that have not been declared “war” by our government. Case in point is Korea. Our Armed Forces lost 33,741 dead in that conflict, even though President Truman called our participation a “police action” and never asked Congress for a formal declaration of war.

The point of the matter is that while war is not always clearly defined, the sacrifice of our service personnel is.

With the support of the American Legion and noted West Virginia veteran John Peters, I introduce these bills to correct what many believe is an inequity in determining veterans' pension benefits. The first bill would provide the basic guarantee of a pension to those who served in Korea, Lebanon, Granada and Panama. In each case, American service personnel were faced with significant danger and, again in each case, American lives were lost. With this in mind, I believe it is imperative that our government provide veterans of those conflicts with appropriate pension benefits.

The second bill I am introducing would extend pension benefits to those servicemen and women whose actions earned them the Expeditionary Medal. For those who are unfamiliar with what an Expeditionary Medal is, or the actions for which it is awarded, the Joint Chiefs of Staff must determine that the service personnel is engaged where hostile action by foreign armed forces is imminent. Again, I believe those who have put their lives on the line in defense of our country, especially when recognized by the Joint Chiefs, deserve the benefits a military pension provides.

The United States has sent service personnel to all corners of the globe to defend our freedoms and way of life. In all cases, our troops have served nobly and honorably. In several cases, war has been declared officially—and those who participated in those actions certainly deserve to receive a military pension for their sacrifice. However, American personnel have also served in conflicts not officially declared war, and have been faced with incredible dangers. To these veterans I say you deserve the same pension benefits afforded your brothers and sisters in arms who participated in declared wars. I urge Congress to pass these critical bills.

WILLIAM “LES” BROWN: A LEGACY OF INSPIRATION AND ACTIVISM

HON. JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 11, 2005

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, later this month, people in Chicago will gather to celebrate the life and achievements of William “Les” Brown. Les Brown had an enormous influence on the way our nation thinks about homelessness. He was a person of intelligence, creativity, passion and caring who showed that we can each make a difference in helping to create communities that provide support and opportunities for every individual. I am fortunate to have known and been inspired by Les and I, like many Chicagoans, will miss him.

Les Brown was best known as the founder of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, formed in 1980 with the help of the Travelers and Immigrants Aid Society, the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, and other service providers. Karen Singer, executive director of the YWCA Evanston/North Shore, called him the “moral compass” of the movement to end homelessness. Ed Shurna, the current executive of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, acknowledges him as “the chief strategist and idea man behind most of the Coalition's successes” in providing housing, jobs programs and health care for the homeless.

A social worker, former Air Force medical corpsman and a blues pianist, Les Brown used all of his skills to push for solutions. While others ignored the problem, he taught us that homelessness can be solved and that individuals living on the street deserve to be treated with dignity. In 1983, he organized the first national conference on homelessness in Chicago. In 1984, he underwent a heart transplant but never let that slow him down or limit his dedicated activism. For his entire life, he fought to keep this issue at the top of the polit-

ical agenda, reminding us that the homeless are not nameless beings or numbers, but infants and children, working mothers and fathers, returning veterans and those living with illnesses who deserve our support and a safe, decent place to live.

Les Brown grew up in rural Georgia, where he learned his values from his parents, who taught him the values of fairness and social justice. It was the love of the land that he developed in childhood that gave him the inspiration for “Growing Home,” an initiative that helps the homeless learn job skills at an organic farm in Marseilles, Illinois. According to Les, “Homeless people often are without roots. They're not tied down, connected, not part of their family anymore. Our organic farming program is a way for them to connect with nature—to plant and nurture roots over a period of time.

When you get involved in taking responsibility for caring for something, creating an environment that produces growth, then it helps you to build self-esteem and feel more connected.”

There are concrete reminders of Les Brown's accomplishments throughout the Chicagoland area—low-income housing units that would not have been built without him, organizations and coalitions that would not exist but for his leadership, initiatives like Growing Home that grew from his vision. Some of the best evidence of his legacy can be found in the people he touched and motivated and who will carry on his work.

Les Brown had an enormous impact and influence on the people he met, creating a generation of advocates who will follow in his path. One of them, Fred Friedman, wrote the following in commemoration:

LES BROWN'S LEGACY

Les Brown died the other day. I did not know him very well or very long but he was very dear to me.

I first met Les when I was still living in a homeless shelter. As you might guess, it was at a meeting about homeless youth. Later, he was kind enough to see me in the office of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. I was trying to decide what, if anything, to do with my life. At that meeting, I told him that people, including myself, sometimes had trouble seeing me as anything other than a mentally ill homeless person. He said that he understood, and that some people had trouble seeing him as anything other than a person with a bad heart. I am sure that was a lie. Who could think Les had a bad heart? However, it was incredibly kind.

I got to know him a little better at many endless Continuum (of Care) meetings. Eventually, he nominated me for the Governing Board of the Continuum. Still later, he, along with Paul Selden and I, founded Next Steps, NFP. Still later, I got to hear him play a mean Jazz piano.

I do not know his family, or if he left any property to them, but I do know that he left me a great legacy. Les saw people without homes and tried to find them homes. He saw hungry people and tried to feed them. He saw people without power, and tried to empower them. He saw people without hope and tried to give them hope. He took his work, but not himself, seriously. He could disagree without being disagreeable. He understood that good people could disagree with him, and that he could be wrong. In short, Les left me a legacy of trying and working, even when trying and working seems silly. In other words, he left me legacy of hope. I promise to use that legacy to continue his fight, until no one